

To Accept the Things We Cannot Change

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Summary: Sequel to "A Time to be Silent...." Repercussions of a hidden life.

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> <meta name="Generator"> **To Accept the Things We Cannot Change**

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**Summary: **This story follows after "A Time to be Silent and a Time to Speak," where Amanda's family learns of her marriage to Lee. While the Agency does not officially know of the marriage, the repercussions of keeping it hidden emerge both at home and at work.

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Scene One: Late August 1987

"Oh come on Lee! It's only for a week! Two at the most, Billy said," Amanda was almost yelling in frustration.

"I don't like it. You'll be all alone. You don't even speak German!"

"Francine does," replied Amanda.

"And how long do you think she'll hang around?" Lee wanted to know.

"I'm supposed to help her finish her case and then she's going to stay until I'm done with my meetings. We'll fly back together." Amanda explained. "We've been over this before. Billy trusts me to do

this. Why can't you?"

"I trust you, Amanda! I just don't like the fact that Billy has been splitting us up lately. I'm used to watching your back. I guess I just don't like having to trust someone else to do it," Lee admitted.

Amanda gave her husband a hug. "It'll be fine. You know why he's been separating us lately. We're not supposed to be working in the field together. Even though he has refused to let us discuss our situation with him, he knows it's only a matter of time until he has to split us up officially. Billy just wants us to be ready when that happens."

"I know, I know," Lee responded. "You are more than qualified to do this. Probably more qualified than I am to watch the boys while you are gone. " He paused for a minute. "And since the President's speech in June, we need to tread lightly over there. Billy's right: you are the best choice for this trip."

Amanda smiled. "Was that so tough to admit?"

"Only a little," Lee replied. With Joe back in Africa trying to clean up the latest EAO mess, Lee had been much more of an active participant in all of their lives over the summer. While everything on the home front seemed to be progressing smoothly, he was still uncertain of his parenting abilities.

"I can't wait until Phillip can drive!" Lee sighed.

"Oh yes you can!" Amanda laughed, "because you know the first thing he's going to want to drive is your car!"

Lee groaned, and shook his head. "I give up. We'll tell them at dinner tonight. Besides, your mother will still be around while you're gone. But we're gonna miss you."

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Scene Two: Amanda's house, Wednesday, the week before school starts

"Phillip! Where's that folder your mom left for the school?" Lee was running late and having trouble with the coffee pot. He had just noticed the reminder Amanda had left on the freezer about Phillip's high school registration packet being due that morning.

"Morning Lee. Good morning boys." Dotty came in the kitchen and took over the coffee preparations. "What's with you this morning? I know I've seen you make coffee before, Lee."

Lee looked embarrassed. "How does Amanda do this all in the morning and still get to work before lunch? She makes it seem so . . . effortless." He smiled to himself as he thought of how he used to watch her through the kitchen window, or the back door, as she tried to finish up to head to work.

"Practice, dear, lots and lots of practice. She's gotten very good at, um, juggling things these last several years." Dotty gave Lee a glance that was part smile, part frown. He knew that while she had been happy to see them together, she was less than thrilled with her

daughter's career choice and the secrets and lies that went along with it.

At that point, Lee was saved having to respond as Phillip and Jamie came in the kitchen. "Do I need to go with you?" Phillip wanted to know.

"I have no idea," Lee admitted. "Did your mom mention anything when she called yesterday?"

"He wasn't home," Jamie said sullenly. "He's never home anymore. But Mom didn't mention it. She said she'd call you at work this morning, but I guess that would be too late."

"Okay. Phillip - we're leaving in ten minutes. Toss your bike into your mom's car and you can bike back here when you're done. I'm sorry, but I have to head to work right from the school."

"Mom's car? Can't we at least take the 'vette?" Phillip wanted to know.

"And where would your bike go?" Lee asked him.

"I'll walk back, or take my skateboard. It's not that far. Please? It'd be way cooler than the Jeep."

"Okay," answered Lee, remembering being new to school more times than he'd wanted to be. "Listen, Dotty, I might be late tonight. Is that okay?" She nodded, but Lee noticed Jamie looking concerned. "I have a lot of paperwork to catch up on with your mom gone. I'll try to make it an early day tomorrow and we have a long weekend coming up before she gets home. Maybe the two of us can do something then?"

Jamie smiled. "Other than cleaning up the house?"

"Yeah, other than that. Just let me know what you want to do, okay?"

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Scene Three: Sheraton Hotel, West Berlin, Wednesday evening

"Come on Amanda, get rid of that stuff!" Francine was getting anxious.

"I don't understand what the problem is. Nothing official in here has "Stetson" on it." Amanda complained.

Francine rolled her eyes. Since overhearing the Stasi agents discussing the arrival of Mrs. Stetson in Berlin, her thoughts had been in a jumble. First, she was incredulous, but as she thought about it, everything made sense. It really did explain an awful lot of Lee's actions over the past several months, especially after the kidnapping in June. Then she was worried. It had been difficult, to say the least, to convince Amanda that the Stasi knew her secret and that her marriage to Lee would probably present a major obstacle to her mission.

"Listen, we've got to meet my contact tonight. I don't want anything on you tied to Lee, or anything left behind here either. Just get rid

of it all!"

"Francine! I can't just get rid of it all!" Amanda tried to explain. Sure, she could destroy the pictures in her wallet, and the couple of notes tucked in her suitcase. But getting rid of her wedding ring was just taking things too far. "Here, you take this," she said, as she removed the ring from the chain around her neck.

Francine looked at the ring. She fingered it, and read the inscription. February 13, 1987. "February?" she asked.

"Nick Grant case . . . " Amanda began.

"Okay, okay. You can tell me all about it on the flight home. But for now I don't want to know. It won't help either of us. Have you had any luck getting through to Lee?"

"Nope. International lines are down. If we miss our check-in tomorrow, they'll know something's up. Right?" It didn't seem as urgent as Francine was making it. They were in West Berlin after all, even if they happened to be surrounded by a few hundred miles of East Germany. Even their meetings with the G.D.R. representatives were being held on the western side of the city.

Francine realized this wasn't the time to be completely truthful. "I'm probably overreacting, probably just being cautious. We won't miss our check-in tomorrow. Now let's get out of here or we'll be late."

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Scene Four: Amanda's house, Wednesday night

Lee let himself in quietly, not wanting to disturb anyone and feeling guilty that it was already almost midnight. He saw the back of a blond head sitting on the couch, and walked in to apologize to his mother-in-law. When he got into the living room, he realized it was Jamie.

"What's up?" Lee asked softly.

"Mom sounded upset on the phone today. Phillip wasn't home again, and she said she hadn't been able to reach you."

Lee cursed under his breath. "I had to be out most of the day. It was unexpected. No one else around to do it."

"She said to call her when you got in tonight. I think something's wrong. She didn't even seem to care that Phillip wasn't around or anything."

Lee walked over to the phone and tried to reach the hotel where Amanda and Francine were staying. The international lines were all busy, and he slammed the phone down in frustration. "I'll keep trying for a while. Why don't you get to bed?"

"Phillip's still not home," Jamie admitted.

"Oh great." Lee looked over to his younger stepson. "Any ideas on how your mom would handle this?" he wanted to know.

"She'd probably ground him. The only problem with that is you or Grandma would need to be around to keep an eye on him, and . . . "

"And I haven't been around much," Lee finished. "Guess that's about to change. Thanks, champ."

"Good night Lee," said Jamie as he walked upstairs.

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Scene Five: Amanda's House early Thursday morning

The ringing of the phone next to his head startled Lee. He picked it up. "Amanda?"

"No, I'm calling for Dorothea West," the voice on the other end of the phone stated.

Lee looked around, disoriented. He had fallen asleep on the couch, after several unsuccessful tries to contact Amanda in West Berlin. He noticed the clock said 5:30. "Just a minute, I'll go wake her up. Who's calling?"

"This is Presbyterian Hospital, in Augusta. I'm calling on behalf of Mrs. West's sister, Lillian. There's been an accident, and a request that Mrs. West be notified."

Lee put the phone down, and went up to knock on Dotty's door. "Dotty - there's a call for you." She opened the door, half awake. "Your sister Lillian's in the hospital," Lee explained as Dotty grabbed her robe and went to the upstairs phone.

Lee went back downstairs and hung up the phone in the living room. He looked around, and saw Phillip's sneakers and sweatshirt on the floor by the side of the couch. He shook his head, knowing he had been awake until at least 2 A.M. Grabbing the sweatshirt and shoes, he marched upstairs.

He opened Phillip's door without knocking and threw the clothes on the bed. Phillip sat up, rubbing his eyes. "Huh?" was all he managed.

"I'm taking a shower now. Be downstairs in a half an hour." Lee wasn't yelling, in fact he spoke very softly, but the tone of his voice was angrier than Phillip had ever heard it.

"It's not even six . . . , " he started to protest.

"Half an hour. Don't make me wait." Lee slammed the door and went to take his shower. If he didn't know better, he'd swear Phillip looked hung over. Probably just lack of sleep, he thought to himself.

Phillip lay in bed. Shit, he thought, I'm screwed. He lay back down, to stop the room from spinning, and thought about what to do next. Nothing like having a Fed for a stepfather, he grimaced. Then he felt guilty, as he remembered telling Jamie what an okay guy Lee was last spring. And he was an okay guy... just all of a sudden he was also acting like a father, and unfortunately one who seemed to have a pretty good idea about what his stepson had been up to. Slowly,

Phillip got up and made his way to the hall bathroom.

Thirty minutes later, Phillip walked downstairs only to hear Lee slam down the phone and let out a string of curses. Shit, shit, shit, Phillip thought to himself, I picked a really bad time to screw up. Lee turned toward Phillip, and motioned for his stepson to sit down.

"I am not in the mood to hear any explanations this morning. You are grounded. I don't know until when, so don't even ask. The only time you're going to leave this house in the next several days will be on Tuesday when school starts. I have to go to work. I will be back for dinner. I will be calling here to check in on you."

"Lee," Phillip began, "I'm sorry."

"Save it." Lee took a breath. "Listen, once upon a time I was fourteen too. But right now, this morning, there is just too much going on, especially with your mother not around. We'll talk tonight. Okay?"

"Yeah."

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Scene Six: Billy's office, late afternoon Thursday

"I'm starting to get worried, Billy. No one has heard from Amanda since she called Jamie yesterday. At first I couldn't get through because the international lines were busy, but now the hotel rings her room and no one answers. I've left messages all day."

"She checked in here, Lee. It was a very brief message, but nothing out of the ordinary. We'll replay the tapes, just to make sure."

"Thanks, Billy. It's been a rough day."

"Want to talk about it?" Billy asked. "Off the record."

"Off the record?" Lee hesitated for a moment, knowing that in the end, nothing connected to the Agency was ever off the record. He took a breath, and began. "Phillip hasn't been home much lately, and last night he got in who knows when. All I know is that it was sometime after two. I grounded him. Dotty's sister was in a car accident, and she's going to have to fly up there to help out. School starts Tuesday and I haven't a clue what I'm doing!"

Billy laughed. "Sounds like you've got your hands full, Scarecrow. Listen, why don't you take a couple of days off? It's quiet around here, and with Amanda gone it sounds like you should spend some time over at your, um, her house."

"Thanks Billy." Lee started toward the door, and then stopped to voice one more concern. "When is this all going to hit the fan anyway? I know nothing can stay off the record indefinitely around here. You've gone out pretty far for us...."

"You know that conversation you wanted to have with me in June?" Billy asked. "Why don't we have it when Amanda gets back? I think the limb will hold up until then."

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Scene Seven: A jail cell somewhere in East Berlin, early Friday morning

"Dial the phone, Mrs. Stetson!" The guard, if he really was a guard, yelled at Amanda as he held his gun to Francine's temple.

"Stop calling me that!" Amanda was shaking. Francine had reminded her of the necessity of denial. "I'm having trouble dialing."

"Call in and give your status report. Your government must think us stupid, sending the wife of a known enemy of the G.D.R. as an emissary for better relations. But we are not quite ready for your disappearance to be officially noticed. We will make them sweat a bit before they send Scarecrow to us."

Amanda finished dialing, and after several seconds, the IFF operator answered the phone. Glancing over at Francine, she began: "This is Amanda King, the word of the day is . . . "

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Scene Eight: Friday evening, Arlington

"Are you sure Phillip was home all day?" Lee asked. His pacing around the living room was making both Jamie and Dotty nervous. Phillip had gone upstairs immediately after dinner, not wanting to face his stepfather until it was absolutely necessary.

"Yes Lee," answered Dotty.

"And she didn't call?"

"No Lee. But you said she checked in at work."

"I know, I know. She probably got busy. It happens," he admitted.

"You're starting to make me nervous. Maybe I shouldn't be leaving tonight. Lillian can hire someone."

"No, no, you go," Lee answered. "She's probably having an easier time over there than I am here, and I really wanted to talk to her about it," he admitted. Lee looked at Jamie, not sure if he should ask the question while he was in the room. Jamie seemed to pick up on his discomfort, and quietly excused himself to go read in his room. "How would Amanda handle what happened the other night?" he asked.

"Probably as you did," Dotty answered, "although with a bit more yelling." Lee couldn't help but grimace as he thought of some of his 'discussions' with his wife. "To tell you the truth, both boys have been remarkably well behaved up until now. Maybe it's the stress of school starting, wanting to fit in somewhere, all of the changes around here. You know," Dotty took a pause, as she tried to decide whether to continue, "it hasn't been an easy adjustment. We find out about your jobs and your marriage just as we were getting used to the two of you dating. Then, you don't even move in here full-time."

Lee looked down, feeling guilty but not knowing how to explain their decision to keep his apartment. "At work, well, they don't exactly officially know we're married."

"What?" Dotty exclaimed.

"We tried to get it all out in the open in June, after the kidnapping, but Billy, um, Mr. Melrose, didn't want to hear it then. We probably can't work together in the field once it's public, and there have been open cases to finish up, and . . . "

"So the lies continue," Dotty finished.

Lee sat back, thinking. He and Amanda had been worried about Jamie adjusting, and while they weren't exactly buddies, there was definitely slow progress being made. He and Phillip had hit it off immediately, but as Lee's role changed from that of a friend to an authority figure, he sensed that Phillip was the one having trouble adjusting.

"You know," Lee began to voice his thoughts, "we thought Jamie was going to be the difficult one."

"It's just that you and Jamie are so different, Lee," Dotty reminded him. "But he's an awful lot like his mother, you know." She paused. "Phillip is more like you, I think."

Lee nodded. "Up until now I think that helped us get along."

"Except now, with Amanda gone, you're in charge." Dotty could see where this was heading. The two of them needed to sit down and talk. She just didn't know how much luck Lee was going to have getting Phillip to open up, especially when he was so obviously uncomfortable doing so himself.

"Why don't I go upstairs and try to talk to Phillip?" Lee suggested. "Maybe let him know that I do remember being his age, even if it was a long time ago."

"I think that's a good idea. Good luck." Dotty smiled. "You'll get it eventually. A mother knows these things."

"Thanks," Lee told her, as he gave her a brief hug. "Have a good trip."

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Scene Nine: Phillip's Room, Friday evening

Lee knocked on the door, and then opened it slowly. "I think we need to talk."

Phillip had been lying on the bed, reading and moved himself into a sitting position as Lee entered. "I guess."

"What happened Wednesday night?" Lee asked.

"Nothing. It was just a party. You know, end of summer, start of high school. Just kind of lost track of time."

"Yeah, right. Until after two?" Lee pushed, but gently.

Phillip sighed. "I didn't have to get up early, you know. It's no big deal."

"Phillip, you're fourteen years old! I know you don't think of yourself as a little kid anymore, but you're not all grown up either." Lee paused for a minute, not sure how to proceed. "Was there any drinking going on?"

"Did I have anything to drink? Is that what you really want to know?" Phillip asked back.

Lee nodded, and watched Phillip look away from him, obviously uncomfortable. "Hey, I'm not having an easy time at this either, Phillip," Lee told him.

"I had a beer, okay? But it was just one. I didn't want to seem like I wasn't with it. I mean, these are my friends, I've known them forever. Nothing bad was going on."

"I just don't want anything bad to happen," Lee admitted. "With your mom gone.... she'd probably kill both of us, you know?"

Phillip nodded. "Can we let it drop now?"

"Yeah, we can let it drop now. But you've got another week to be grounded. Next time remember to look at your watch!"

Lee stood out in the hallway, and leaned against the wall. How bad did that go, he wondered to himself. He wished Amanda were home.

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Scene Ten: East Berlin, early Monday morning

Francine and Amanda heard the scraping sound, and in the dim light were able to make out the envelope that had been pushed under the door. Francine went over to it, and opened it.

"Well, we've got our I.D. cards back, and other personal effects. But no passports."

"What good does any of that do us in here, anyway?" Amanda asked.

As Francine thought about that very question, the door was opened, and a guard in military uniform motioned for the two women to follow him. Without speaking, he escorted them to a waiting taxi, and handed the driver a piece of paper. A few moments later, the driver stopped in front of a hotel in one of the nicer parts of East Berlin. As the women departed the cab, they noticed their bags waiting for them on a hotel luggage cart.

"I think that's the answer to your question Amanda. We're free . . . sort of. Let's get settled and try to get a message out." Francine walked to the hotel, and Amanda followed wondering what was going on.

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Scene Eleven: Arlington, early Monday evening

Lee had just opened a beer, and was taking dishes out of the cabinet. "What do you guys want to drink?" He asked Phillip and Jamie.

"Do we have any soda left?" Jamie wanted to know, thinking how bare the refrigerator had looked that morning.

"Yes. I bought some earlier. Don't give me that look. I didn't even get lost going to the supermarket." Lee shook his head, smiling.

The doorbell rang, and as Lee went to answer it as the phone started to ring. He thrust two twenty-dollar bills at Phillip. "Pay for dinner while I answer that."

"King residence," Lee said.

"It hit the fan Scarecrow. I need you down here now. Pack a bag. You're leaving on the 9:30 flight for Frankfurt tonight." Lee heard Billy slam down the phone.

"Great," he mumbled.

"What's up?" Jamie wanted to know.

"I don't know. But I've got to leave town tonight. Where's the number your Grandmother left us?"

As Lee called Dotty to apologize, and arrange for her to return early, Phillip walked in with the Chinese food. Jamie motioned him into the living room. "Something's up. I think it's about Mom. Lee has to leave tonight. What are we going to do?" he asked his older brother.

Phillip shrugged. "Maybe stay here by ourselves?"

Jamie looked at him skeptically. "Yeah, right. You're grounded, remember?" He reminded his brother. "Any ideas of who we can stay with?"

Phillip thought for a moment. Danny owed him a favor for helping him sneak home the other night . . . "I'll call Danny. We can probably hang in his basement tonight and just go to school from there. I bet Grandma will be home by tomorrow afternoon."

"If Lee goes for it," Jamie said.

Phillip looked at Lee, frantically making phone calls and scribbling notes. "He'll go for it. One less thing for him to do tonight."

Thirty minutes later, the boys heard Lee's car pulling away from the curb. Phillip turned to Jamie, "Danny's mom will be here in a few minutes. Do you have all your stuff?"

As Jamie went back upstairs to check, Phillip went into the kitchen to throw out the remains of their hasty dinner, and finish Lee's forgotten beer.

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Scene Twelve: Hotel, East Berlin

They had been in the hotel for a few hours. Amanda sat in a chair in their hotel room looking out the window onto the alley below. Francine was finishing up on the phone, finally having been able to reach the Agency. From the portion of the conversation Amanda could overhear, things weren't going well.

Francine hung up the phone, and sat down in the chair opposite Amanda. "We got lucky."

"Huh?" Amanda couldn't figure out what Francine could possibly mean.

"Our release - we got lucky," Francine began. "Seems that there are enough people in the government interested in pursuing a slow path to peace, and having the Stasi hold us wasn't good P.R. That's the good news."

"And the rest?" Amanda was almost afraid to ask.

"Dr. Smyth was in Billy's office while I was on the phone. He's mad, Amanda, really, really mad. Lucky for us, he's going to wait until we're back to show his wrath."

"So we're leaving?"

"Not yet." Francine sighed. She was pleasantly surprised with how well Amanda had held up during this trip, and was forced to admit to herself that maybe Amanda King, oh that's right, Amanda Stetson, had actually turned into an acceptable agent. Still, if it weren't for Amanda they wouldn't even be here right now. "Billy is sending over someone to help us get out. But he thinks it may take a while. Lots of ruffled feathers need to be smoothed."

"Someone?" Amanda asked.

Francine nodded, "Yeah, he should be here sometime tomorrow. You know, of all the people I would have suspected of having a secret life, Amanda . . ."

Amanda shot her a glance. "Not tonight Francine, please? I'm sorry you got dragged into all of this, whatever all of this really is, but I really don't want to have to deal with your insinuations right now!"

Francine bit her tongue. "Okay, fair enough. But you owe me, Amanda, and a box of gourmet chocolates isn't going to cover it this time."

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Scene Thirteen: Billy's office, later Monday evening

"Okay, Scarecrow, the driver should be ready for you in about 15 minutes. Anything we've forgotten?"

Lee looked through the packet Billy had handed him. Duplicate passports for Amanda and Francine, East and West German currency, the letter from the President . . . he let out a sigh.

"I'm sorry, Billy."

"Dr. Smyth is mad at you and Amanda for this little deceit that you got past him and for being named in this whole mess. He's also mad at me for not preventing it one way or another and because he learned all of this through G.D.R. Intelligence." He sighed, and thought how hard it was to fit friendship into Agency life and how much harder still to fit what Lee and Amanda had. "There's an official reprimand going into both of your files, I'm sorry to say." Billy held his hand up. "I know, that one's my fault. You both tried to talk to me, and I didn't want it on the record yet."

"What about you?" Lee asked.

"I've got a lovely little letter in my file as well. Luckily, I'm not trying to move up from here, so I doubt it's going to cause me any trouble. We can sort this out when you get back. Just get them out safely."

Lee walked to the door and turned around. He walked back to Billy's desk. "Listen, I haven't given the boys much information. Dotty will be back tomorrow. I've left messages for Joe with EAO, just in case . . ." He couldn't finish the sentence, much less the thought.

"I'll keep an eye out Lee," Billy said. "Just get them home."

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Scene Fourteen: Arlington, Mid-afternoon, two weeks later

"Doesn't look like anyone is home yet," Amanda sighed, as Lee opened the front door and brought their bags in.

"Maybe there's a note?" Lee suggested.

Amanda walked silently into the living room and sank back on the couch. "I think I'm glad they're not here yet. I don't know how to explain the last couple of weeks."

"I'm not sure either," Lee replied. "But I don't think telling them that you were detained as the wife of a notorious American terrorist is the way to go."

"How did you ever earn that badge of honor anyway? You still haven't explained that." Amanda asked her husband.

Lee just shook his head. "The workings of the East German mind . . . I'm just glad we all got out safe." He paused, and decided to continue. "You know, I really didn't know how we were going to get out for a while there. They seemed to enjoy having me in a cell, and you and Francine detained due to lack of proper identification. Thank God cooler minds finally prevailed. I think I've done enough diplomatic groveling to last a lifetime."

Amanda looked at her husband, "But you're not done. There's still the meeting with Dr. Smyth tomorrow morning. Do we even have jobs?"

"I don't know," Lee admitted. "The talks are resuming. I guess we should be thankful that world opinion is forcing the G.D.R. to take a reconciliatory stance."

"We probably have a bit of reconciling to do ourselves, Lee, after being gone so long." Amanda began. "I'm not ready for the boys to know too many details of my job. But I'd hate to think that they might have been left with unanswered questions if something had gone wrong. I thought it would be easier to balance everything as the boys get older, but it's not. It's getting harder. Do you know this is the first time I've ever missed the start of the school year?"

Lee laughed softly at his wife's remark, and she looked at him questioningly. "Well, I did hear one comment while dropping off Phillip's forms at the high school," he teased, "but I don't know if I should tell you."

"What?"

"One of the women in line behind me made a comment along the lines of 'if that's why we've seen so little of Amanda King then the PTA may have lost her for good.' I was tempted to turn around and ask her to clarify her remark."

"Lee! Oh my gosh . . . , " Amanda sighed. "Did Phillip hear that?"

"I don't think so. He was hanging out in front of the school with some other guys on skateboards." Lee noticed that the worried look had returned to his wife's face. "We'll get through all of this together. One thing at a time."

"I know."

Lee walked over to the stereo and found some soothing music. "For now, can I just hold my wife? I've missed her very much."

As they stood there, holding each other and swaying slightly to the music, the world faded away. Neither of them heard the sound of a car pulling up, nor the front door opening. Jamie's voice made them both jump.

"You're home!" he explained, running over to give Amanda a big hug. "Are you okay? What happened?"

Amanda sank down into the couch with her arms still around her youngest son. "We're fine. I'm fine. It was all a diplomatic mix up. I can't really go into details sweetheart. But I'm home now."

Amanda looked up, noticing that Phillip was still standing in the doorway. "Hey, don't I get a welcome home hug?" She got up and walked toward him.

"I'm really glad you're home, Mom," he said as he ran up the stairs, "I'll be down in a minute."

Amanda looked at Lee, and then at Jamie. "What was that all about?"

Lee shrugged. He hadn't had a chance to fill Amanda in on the details of Phillip's behavior while she had been gone, or to find out if he had given Dotty any difficulty during the last two weeks. As he

thought over the events of the last month, the whole summer really, Lee conceded to himself the truth in Amanda's earlier statement. It was a tough balancing act. But as Lee looked over at his wife, he realized he almost missed out on all of it. He was very thankful that Amanda was persistent enough to convince him how real what they had was. He was even thankful that their marriage was now out in the open, and that he could participate in this family of theirs, surly teenagers and all.

Jamie coughed, "Phillip probably just wanted to get cleaned up." He paused, obviously torn about what to say next. "I think high school is making him weird." Jamie got up and started toward the stairs. "Oh, I almost forgot. Danny's mom dropped us off. Grandma's out flying with Captain Curt. She said she'd be home by dinner time."

"Thanks Jamie," Lee said. "I'm sure Dotty needed some time to herself after these last few weeks." He sat back down on the couch, and Amanda joined him. Clearing his throat, he began, "I should probably fill you in on a little stunt Phillip pulled while you were gone . . ."

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Scene Fifteen: Q Bureau, the next afternoon

"Suspended?" Amanda sat at her desk shaking her head. "We're suspended!"

"It's only sixty days. At least we have jobs to come back to when it's over." Lee sat on the edge of the desk, holding his wife's hand and rubbing the rings she was finally able to wear in the open.

"Billy was pretty vague about what those jobs would be, Lee," Amanda reminded him.

"I know, I know. But it's not as bad as I thought it might be," he admitted.

She looked up at him, shaking her head. It had taken her five years, but she had finally been given an international assignment of her very own . . . and then it came crashing down around her. Lee seemed far more at ease with all of this than she was. Amanda was thinking of all of the twists and turns of her adult life, altered plans, and almost accomplishments.

"I just wish Billy had let us come clean in June like we wanted to!" she exclaimed. "Then this wouldn't have happened."

"Amanda, it's not all his fault. And as far as 'this' not happening, well, you probably wouldn't have been even assigned the Berlin case," Lee began.

Amanda held up her hand, not wanting to hear this yet. "Lee, I've worked really hard, and it really hurts me to have it all taken away like this. No acknowledgment . . ."

"It's a sixty-day suspension," he reminded her. "It could have been worse."

She sighed. "Okay, let's just get out of here and go home. Do you think the boys will be able to stand having us around for the next two months?"

"They'll manage," he answered, looking her in the eyes, "we all will. Why don't we take this time to do some reshuffling? It's probably about time I gave up the apartment. There's really no need for it anymore."

"You know, Scarecrow, I think I'm gonna miss that place," Amanda admitted. Looking around the Q Bureau, she realized how much of their private life had been spent either here or at Lee's. It would be hard not having either place as a haven, to tune out the rest of the world.

As they stood to go, Billy entered the office. "I wanted to touch base with both of you before you headed out," he began. "I'm sorry about the suspension. I wanted to give you two a heads up, though, on your assignments when you return."

"Assignments?" Lee asked, noting the plural.

"I'm sorry. Doctor Smyth made these decisions himself. Amanda, you will be assigned to the East German meeting coming up in the next few months. Making sure that the entire visit goes smoothly, that all of the officials are properly taken care of."

Lee rolled his eyes, "Punishment?" he asked.

"Let's just say it's a way of showing our sincerity in making amends what happened there. There are some in the East German camp who would like nothing more than total public humiliation for both of you. This is the best we could do. I'm sorry Amanda."

Billy noticed that Amanda would not meet his gaze, and so he continued. "Lee, you will be rotated out of the Q Bureau, and will be helping to lead up some of the Middle Eastern bombing investigations. We'll be working closely with military intelligence. They are getting mighty tired of having their people be targets, especially when they're off duty." He walked to the door, and turned as he opened it. "I'm sorry. There may be some other alternatives we can talk through after the holidays, but for now, this is how things stand."

Amanda just looked at Lee, who was staring out the window.
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Scene Sixteen: Halloween night, 1987

"Mom, you don't have to drive me over!" Phillip was protesting.

"Listen, I'm dropping your brother off at his party, I can drop you off at the same time."

Phillip shook his head. First she wasn't around, now she was always around. He felt torn between a desperate need for space, and a longing to stay. He knew that he couldn't protect her, but he hated how he felt after Lee had gone after her. He knew that something was very wrong, but no one would talk about it and he didn't know how to ask. Pushing the thoughts that he could not control from his mind, he

grabbed his jacket. "Fine, let's just go then."

"Phillip!" Lee said in a warning tone.

"Sorry"

"Night Lee," Jamie said as he headed out the door.

Lee sat on the couch, picked up the newspaper, and attempted to read it. The last month and a half had been a very different experience for him. With no job to go to, and no apartment to hide in, there was little escape from family life. Lee shook his head, thinking of how Phillip reminded him of himself at that age. He hoped that Phillip had more good sense than he had. Still, there were images he could not get out of his mind: Phillip the morning Amanda was gone, Phillip not wanting to greet his mother when they came home . . .

He walked into the kitchen, took out a glass, and opened the refrigerator looking for the beer he had bought the prior week. His thoughts, however, were interrupted by the doorbell, and he walked to the front door to distribute the candy to the newest bunch of gremlins and ghosts.

A little later, Amanda came in through the back door, and saw her husband sitting in a folding chair holding the candy bowl on his lap and smiling. She watched him, as the doorbell rang and he talked to the children as they took their candy from him. As he closed the door, Lee noticed Amanda watching him.

"So did the boys get off without too much fighting?"

"Yeah, they were actually very quiet in the car. I think Jamie was envying Phillip a bit - it looked like he was going to have a pretty tame night in comparison." Amanda thought back to the bustling party Phillip was going to, and the quiet house she had dropped Jamie off at. At least she had the sense enough to call both houses earlier and verify that there would be parents present.

"I think Jamie's worried about Phillip," Lee began. Amanda looked at him questioningly, and he continued. "He's been dropping hints around me, but I'm not sure what it is that he won't say straight out. He definitely doesn't like some of Phillip's new friends."

"Do you think he's jealous?" Amanda asked.

"No, it's something else." Lee walked into the kitchen, and snapped his fingers, remembering, "Amanda, did you finish off that beer I picked up last week?"

"No, it should still be there. Isn't it?"

Lee shook his head.

"Maybe Mother and Captain Curt had some the other night. They were up pretty late watching that old movie," she reminded him.

"Maybe," Lee answered, not sure if he should voice his concerns just yet. Maybe he'd talk to Phillip first.

"Well there's some wine in here," Amanda said. "Would you like a

glass?"

Lee nodded. "Do you think that the trick-or-treating is about over?" he asked. "It's almost nine o'clock, and I figure, Mrs. Stetson, that we have about three hours before the boys are home . . . "

"Well, Mr. Stetson, then I think that our trick-or-treating is only just starting." Lee watched while his wife turned off the outside lights, picked up the bottle of wine and started up the stairs.

"Coming?" she asked with a grin.

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Scene Seventeen: Thanksgiving Night, 1987

"Is it over?" Amanda wanted to know.

"Everything but the mess," Lee answered.

"That can wait. I'm beat! What possessed me to have everyone over for dinner our first week back at work?" She walked into the living room, holding her wine glass.

Lee laughed. "It's just us, now. I can't believe Joe and Carrie took the boys for the rest of the weekend."

"I know, he's barely back in the country and has his hands full. I hope Carrie doesn't mind. You know, I think it will do them all some good. Phillip had a good day, didn't he?" Amanda asked.

"He was civil all during dinner," Lee admitted. "It's really weird having Jamie be the talkative one."

"You're telling me." Amanda paused. "Do you think it's just high school?"

Lee put his glass on the table and took Amanda's hand in his. "I think it's a lot of things: high school, being a fourteen-year-old boy who doesn't want to be a little boy anymore," he paused, "being a fourteen-year-old boy who doesn't know how to show he is scared."

Amanda looked at him, and waited for him to continue.

"You know, Amanda, Jamie asked a lot of questions this summer about what we do. He asked a bunch more after we got back from Germany. Phillip didn't ask any. He didn't even stay in the room most of the time to hear my answers to Jamie. I had hoped that having these last two months off, well, that he would have opened up a little."

"The two of you did so much together," Amanda said, "he never brought any of this up?"

"Nope. I look at him, Amanda, and I see myself at that age." Lee got up and walked toward the fireplace. "That scares me."

Amanda got up and walked over to her husband. "I'm glad this is all out in the open." Lee gave her a questioning look. "Our marriage," she explained. "I don't think I could do this part alone, you know. I'm afraid my experience with the mind of a teenage boy is limited at best." Amanda closed her eyes, glad for the long weekend. Being back

at work wasn't as bad as she had thought it would be, but it was certainly not pleasant. Dr. Smyth had assigned her to play the role of, as he put it, "Mrs. Everything-nice" Her pasted smile had worn thin by the end of each day, and she was tired of being the peacemaker.

"What do you think Billy meant by other options?" Amanda asked, changing the subject.

"Not having fun this week?" Lee teased.

"I'm serious, Lee. I feel as if I'm being treated like, oh, I don't know, an ornament . . . a hostess. It doesn't seem like good use of my training."

"I know, and I'm sorry. I almost feel guilty enjoying this past week," Lee admitted. "I've missed the action. I don't miss worrying about you."

"It's not fair." Amanda said, playfully punching him in the arm. "Although I know it must be hard for you."

"Let's sit back down." Lee led Amanda back to the couch. "I miss working with you. I miss walking into the office and seeing your face. But there are things I don't miss as well. I don't miss worrying about you, or having you worry about me. I don't miss knowing that your mother and the boys might be actively worrying about us. I'm working with good people, and for the most part it's much safer work. I don't know how the next few months will play out, but I kind of like being able to send someone else out on the more dangerous assignments. I like making it home for dinner." Lee laughed. "I think I'm getting soft."

"Not a chance Stetson," Amanda said as she held his hands. "You're maturing, and I find it very attractive. Two months ago I was frustrated and angry about leaving the Agency. Now I'm frustrated about being back. I'm finding it very hard to balance everything right now, and if anything new were to be added into the equation . . . I don't know how I'd cope." She sighed. "I know you're worried about Phillip. So am I. It's funny, I thought Jamie would be the more difficult one, but he seems to have figured out how to work through his issues. Phillip just buries them down deep."

Lee was silent for a moment. "And then there's the drinking."

Amanda nodded. "I know. You'd think being confronted by it after Halloween would have drummed some sense in his head. I swear, part of me just wanted to throttle him! Oh well, he's Joe's problem for the weekend. It's been a little much having him home every single night."

"I don't think he's been particularly enjoyed it either," Lee reminded her. "Thank God he didn't throw up in my car!" Phillip had ended up grounded for the past several weeks after his latest incident on Halloween. Lee had not enjoyed the ride home that night as his stepson sat next to him, looking positively green and trying to hold it together until he made it home.

"You know, I miss the days when his biggest problems were not doing

his homework and getting a bad grade, or sending a baseball through a window and lying about it. That I know how to deal with. I don't know how to deal with this though." She took a breath. "I know it's popular to drink at parties. I do remember being in high school, and while I could never tell him it's okay, I also know that I was not eighteen when I had my first drink."

"I worry that it might not be just at parties, " Lee began.

"Then it wouldn't be quite as frightening," Amanda finished. "But I also have noticed the changes on our own supply." She looked at their wine glasses on the table. "I never thought that my behavior around the house would so directly endanger my son, or that I'd feel so helpless about how to deal with it."

They sat silently together, their thoughts a mixture of thanksgiving for the blessings of the past year, and concern for the fallout from their own actions.

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Scene Eighteen: Christmas Eve afternoon, 1987

Amanda was getting concerned as the snow continued to fall. "Jamie, where is your brother?"

"I don't know, Mom. He said he had to do some last minute shopping and that Gina's sister was going to take them to the mall."

Phillip's new girlfriend worried Amanda. She had to admit that since they'd been dating Phillip's behavior had seemed to stabilize. There had been no replays of Halloween, and no more missing beer from the refrigerator. Still, even though there was nothing specific that Amanda could put a finger on, she just wasn't comfortable with how much time the two of them had been spending together, much of it at Gina's house. Amanda had met Gina's father several times, and she knew he was having a tough go of being a single parent to two teenage girls.

The ringing of the phone startled Amanda. "Hello?" she said, hoping it was Lee saying he was back from his trip.

"I'm still in New York."

"Oh, no. Lee, when will you get here?" she wanted to know.

"I don't know. Everything is grounded right now due to snow. Even AMTRAK isn't going anywhere. Is everything okay there?"

"Yes, no, I don't know."

"Huh?"

"Mother got off before the snow started. It's hard to imagine not having her here for Christmas, but I know she wanted to spend some more time with her sister, and given that Aunt Lillian didn't feel up to flying, well, it's just not the same."

"Is that all?" Lee asked, already knowing the answer.

"It's really snowing now, and Phillip's not home yet."

"It'll be fine. It's Christmas Eve, Amanda. The snow will probably keep the bad guys home too," he teased. "I'll give you a call in about another hour. Maybe conditions here will improve by then."

"Optimist," she replied, starting to smile.

"No, I just refuse to let the weather get in the way of our first official Christmas together, Mrs. Stetson."

"Oh Lee," Amanda sighed. "That's sweet. I love you. Bye." Amanda hung up the phone, and walked back to the window to watch the snow. Jamie came up and put his arm around her.

"It'll be kind of nice just the four of us this year, Mom," he admitted.

She smiled, happy to see how well her youngest son had adjusted to having Lee around. In the end, he was doing better than she would have thought. She realized that Jamie didn't need Lee around as a friend. He needed him to be around as a father. Joe tried, but between his job and Carrie he would often cancel out on the boys. Amanda remembered the feeling of coming in second to a job. She didn't like for her sons to have that same feeling.

As her thoughts turned to Phillip, the smile faded. Phillip was still having trouble adjusting to a male authority figure in the house. Lee as a friend worked well. Lee as a father . . . she shook her head . . . it wasn't just Lee, it would have been anyone she realized. Phillip had gotten used to Joe not being around much. He knew how to work his mother and grandmother, but Lee was another matter entirely. Phillip was chafing in the new situation and had been for months. The tension would occasionally spill over into her time alone with Lee. She knew it was all part of their becoming a family together, but she also missed the way they used to block out the rest of the world.

"All right, enough of this standing at the window and wondering," Amanda broke the silence. "Let's make some hot cocoa. Maybe your brother will be back soon, and we'll hear from Lee on when to expect him."

As they walked back toward the kitchen, the phone rang. Jamie listened to his mother as she barely whispered her replies to whoever it was on the other end. He noticed that she had turned white, and that she was trying very hard to keep herself steady. Slowly, she hung up the phone and turned to him.

"That was the police," she began.

"What?" Jamie asked.

"There's been an accident on the G.W. Parkway. A car," she paused to catch her breath, "a car ran off the road and down an embankment about a half hour ago." Amanda reached for her son and hugged him tightly. "Phillip was in the car. They're trying to get him up the embankment. We need to go to the hospital."

"Is he okay?" Jamie wanted to know.

"I don't know. He was conscious, knew his name when the rescue crew got there" Amanda knew, though, how quickly things could change. Why wasn't Lee home by now, she thought to herself. I can't even reach him!

"Look, get your coat okay? Get my coat too. I need to try to reach Lee." Amanda didn't wait for a reply, as she began to dial Billy at home. Please be there, she thought to herself, please get Lee home for me.

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Scene Nineteen: Arlington Hospital, early Christmas morning

Lee opened the door slowly, and peeked into the room. Amanda was sitting in a chair next to the bed. He looked at her and thought back to all of those times she sat there, just like that, while he lay in a hospital bed. He hated to see her having to do it now, on Christmas, for her son. Lee sighed, and ran his hand through his hair. When and how had it all gotten so complicated, he wondered to himself. He walked inside, and sat in the chair next to his wife, and held her hand. Amanda looked over to him, gave a weak smile, and then turned back to watch Phillip breathing through the respirator.

Lee wished he had the words to try to comfort her. His emotions were in turmoil. He could barely begin to imagine how she must be feeling. If only he had confronted Phillip earlier about the drinking, if only he had forced him to open up . . . if only they had never held back about the marriage in the first place. He thought back to his conversation with the State Trooper, as he drove to the hospital.

"It looks like they spun out on a slick patch of road, lost control and went down the embankment. No other cars were involved. All the occupants of the car had been drinking, Mr. Stetson," the trooper told him, _"there was an empty six pack in the car, and more beer in the trunk. Your stepson is lucky he was wearing his seatbelt. The other two weren't." _Did Amanda know all this, he wondered. What now?

"Amanda?" he whispered. She turned toward him questioningly. "I'm going to see if Joe's here yet. Okay?" She nodded numbly, and turned back to Phillip.

Walking into the hall, he saw Jamie approaching him. Jamie, who had been doing what Lee should have been doing. As Lee stopped, he was surprised to see Jamie walk closer, and hug him, burying his head in his stepfather's chest. Lee led him to a bench by the nurses' station, and they sat there for a few minutes.

"I called Grandma," Jamie finally said. Lee shook his head, wishing someone else had done that, knowing it should have been him. "She's trying to get a flight back but doesn't know if she can get one today."

"Your dad should be here soon," Lee told him. "I spoke to him after I landed, and told him what I knew."

"I tried calling last night," Jamie began, "but they weren't home, and I didn't know where they were, and Mom was upset . . . " He took a deep breath.

"Jamie, you've done fine. Actually, you've done more than fine. You've done more than anyone would have expected you to. I'm sorry I wasn't here," Lee said.

Jamie took off his glasses and wiped his eyes. He put them back on, and stared down the hallway. "Why did he do it, Lee?"

Lee shook his head. "I don't know. I doubt Phillip knows. I guess he's been having a rougher time than any of us thought. He keeps it all inside, presenting us all with a tough exterior. It's probably his only release." Lee thought back to the many times he'd used alcohol as a release, and was thankful, that for the most part, he had never gotten into serious trouble because of it.

They sat there together like that, until Lee spotted Joe walking toward them. Jamie lifted his head, but didn't get up, forcing Lee to remain seated.

"How is he, Lee?" Joe asked.

"From what they told me, some broken ribs, a broken arm, a concussion, and some internal injuries. As far as we know, nothing too serious. He was conscious right after the accident, but he's been out since they brought him in. Amanda is still in with him." He paused, and looked at Jamie before continuing. "His blood alcohol level was zero point two."

Joe let out a low whistle, and looked at Jamie. "How are you doing?" he asked.

"Okay. Grandma's trying to get back today but she doesn't know if she'll make it. I tried to call you last night but there was no answer."

While the tone wasn't accusatory, Joe noticed that Jamie had moved closer into Lee's side. He knew it wasn't the time or place to show jealousy, but he felt it burning just under the surface. One son was in a hospital bed, the other had not moved toward him. "We lost power for a while. Someone hit a pole due to the weather. We were over at Carrie's folks' house. The answering machine must not have reset itself." Joe stared at Jamie and Lee, and sighed. "Why don't I go and try to give Amanda a break?"

"Good luck," replied Lee, knowing it would be next to impossible to move her from Phillip's side. Jamie stayed silent.

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Scene Twenty: Arlington Hospital, Christmas night

Joe opened the door to Phillip's room slowly. He saw Amanda sitting as she had all day, inches from her son. Lee stood behind her, absently rubbing her shoulders. He walked in. "You two need a break. I'll sit for a while." Amanda shook her head. "Please. Lee, make her go outside for a while."

"No, I can't leave him," Amanda protested, but Lee held her arms, and led her up from the chair and toward the door.

"You need a break," he told her.

In the cafeteria, he tried to lift her mood. "No bad guys this year."

"Nope, no bad guys," she replied sadly. "That's what makes this so hard. I can't blame the driver - the driver's dead. Oh God," she sighed, "how selfish am I to be happy that Phillip survived? What Gina's dad must be going through...."

Lee held her hands across the table. "Let's keep our thoughts with Phillip for now. He's young and strong. No reason not to expect a full recovery."

"Physically, anyway," Amanda gave voice to Lee's unspoken concerns.

"Carrie came by to talk with me earlier," Lee began. Amanda looked at him, not comprehending how his comment fit in. "She hasn't been in to see Phillip because it's dredging up some pretty bad memories. Did you know her younger sister was killed in a car accident?"

"No. Joe never mentioned it."

"It was DWI," Lee stated, "and she was driving."

"Oh my God!" Amanda exclaimed, putting her hands to her mouth. "I had no idea!"

"She thinks she can help, once Phillip is discharged. She's just having a little trouble with the hospital and all right now. I think we should let her talk to him, though."

Amanda nodded. She knew they would have to do something, but had been feeling lost as to what that would be. She knew how to tend to physical injuries. Goodness, Lee had enough of those. It was the underlying causes here that scared her, and made her uncertain of what to do next. She felt terribly guilty about not confronting Phillip earlier about his behavior, but she also knew he had gotten better about hiding it from them. Part of her wondered if she had never let herself get drawn into the Agency if her son would still be lying in a hospital bed. Would she have picked up on his behavior better? Would a more normal life, a male influence earlier on have spared Phillip the turmoil of the last months?

"You look so serious," Lee commented.

Amanda gave a weak smile, noticing the love in his eyes, but not knowing how to respond. "I'm not hungry. I need to go back upstairs." She stood up leave, and Lee followed.

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Scene Twenty-One: Billy's Office, Late January, 1988

"It's a serious offer, Amanda," Billy reiterated. "It's not just to get you out of the field."

"I know, and I do appreciate it," Amanda answered. She mulled over the offer: Assistant to the Section Chief. She knew that he needed help now that Francine's long overdue promotion had gone into effect. She knew that the likelihood of working directly with Lee again was low, at best. It was just that since Phillip's accident, she wasn't

sure she wanted to be here in any capacity. "When do you need my decision?" she asked.

"Take the weekend to think it over, and discuss it with Lee. Let me know Monday morning."

"Thank you, sir."

She walked to the door, but was stopped by Billy. "Amanda?"

"Yes?"

"How is Phillip doing?"

"Physically, his recover is going well. Emotionally it's harder. He is having a hard time dealing with the death of his girlfriend and her sister, and his own actions in all of this."

"It's never easy losing a friend, especially if you feel some responsibility," Billy mused. "I can't even imagine being fifteen and having it happen."

"Thank you for caring, sir. I'll talk to you on Monday."

"Take care of yourself, Amanda. You and Lee both."

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Scene Twenty-Two: Arlington, that evening

"It's a good opportunity, Amanda. We'll still get to work together a bit. You'll have flexibility for the boys." Lee paused. "It's safe."

"I know all that, Lee." She was silent for a few minutes. "What if I turn it down?" she asked him.

"To do what?" he wanted to know, not knowing where she was going with this.

"Stay home."

"Are you serious?" Lee was incredulous. Where had that come from?

"Phillip needs so much: rehab for his arm, help with the school work he's missed, counseling sessions . . . "

"And we already have therapists coming in, his teacher coming over, Carrie comes by each day, Dotty is here . . ." Lee reminded her.

"But I'm his mother!"

"Yes you are. But you are also my wife, and Billy's new assistant."

"Only if I take the position," she pointed out.

He looked at her. "Amanda, you've always loved your job. Well, except for the last few months," he admitted. "You deserve to take the

position. You've earned it. It's the best way to leave the field, and still stay in the loop. Besides, you'll be a great help to Billy and he knows it. The boys wouldn't want you to stay home now."

"Maybe not Jamie," Amanda conceded, "but Phillip doesn't know what he wants."

"And that is going to take time. Everyone has told us that. He has a lot to deal with." Lee's hand tapped quietly on the table. "I don't think denying what you want to do is going to help him in the long run."

"But Lee," Amanda said softly, "I don't know what I want anymore." He was silent, not knowing how to respond. "So much has happened these last eighteen months," she continued, "do you know we've never stopped to catch our breath? I feel like our actions are catching up with us, and maybe all this is trying to tell us something."

Lee was stunned. He waited to see what she was going to say next, but instead Amanda went into the kitchen to get a tray for Phillip and headed up the stairs. He was left sitting in the living room alone.

Later, when she came downstairs, he approached her gently. "Are you trying to tell me something here?"

"I don't know. I just need some time to think this through. Work, you, the boys, all of it. I'm sorry. Do you mind if I go out for a while?"

"No, just be careful."

"Always," she replied, giving his arm a gentle squeeze.
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Scene Twenty-Three: George Washington Parkway overlooking the Potomac

Amanda sat in the car, looking out over the embankment where Phillip's accident had occurred. She could see Georgetown across the river, and the lights of the Kennedy Center. When had it all gotten so complicated, she wondered. Was Lee right? Was she trying to fix something beyond her control? She opened her purse, and pulled out the index card Carrie had given her during Phillip's hospital stay.

Fingering it, she read the words to herself: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. I sure could use some of that wisdom right about now, she thought to herself.

She sat there for another hour, and then realizing the time, started the engine and headed home. As she pulled into the driveway, she made a decision to not decide anything too quickly. She'd sleep on it, and talk it through with both boys, and with Lee.

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Epilogue: March 1991, Arlington

Amanda walked into the house, and put her grocery bags on the table. She was surprised to hear the sounds of Sesame Street in the background - Dotty's car hadn't been in the driveway. She walked into the living room, and paused. Phillip was sitting on the couch, with Emily on his lap. The two of them were completely engrossed in Big Bird singing to them from the television. Phillip's school books were on the floor, covered by Emily's toddler toys.

Amanda smiled. The two of them were in their own world. Phillip adored his little sister, and had taken a more active role in her care than Amanda could have imagined. Especially, she sighed, given where things had been three years ago.

She coughed slightly. "Hey there. Am I interrupting something?"

"Mom!" Phillip said. "No, just caught me watching my favorite TV show." They both laughed.

"Hi Mommy," said Emily, turning her head, but not moving more than a few inches from her brother.

"Did you already bring in the mail, Phillip?"

"Oh!" he exclaimed, jumping up. "I almost forgot." He bent down, and shuffled through his books, and pulled out an envelope. Handing it to his mother, he couldn't hide his grin. The University of Virginia logo was unmistakable.

"Oh my gosh, Phillip! You got in!" Amanda gave her son a large hug. "I'm so happy for you. You have worked so hard for this."

"I couldn't have done it alone," he told her. "You and Lee, and Carrie, and even Dad . . . you all helped me so much. You know, I was afraid to think I could do this, and now here is the proof. U.Va. Wow."

"Have you called Carrie?" Amanda asked.

"No," her son told her. "I really wanted to. It's her victory too. But I had to tell you first. I love you, Mom."

She touched his arm. "Go give her a call. I have some things I need to take care of. Emily," Amanda called to her daughter, "come help Mommy make a surprise!"

As Phillip walked to the phone, Amanda and Emily dug through the hall closet in search of construction paper. Finding the sheets she needed, Emily held them as Amanda covered the outside of the front door in blue and orange. While she knew she couldn't go shout in the street and tell the neighborhood how proud she was of her son, she figured this would be the next best thing.

When they finished, Emily went back inside to play while Amanda sat on the front stoop. Lee would be home soon. It would be the last of his early days for a while, with Billy retiring and Lee preparing to take over. She smiled. It would be good to work together again. Billy had promised her that her job, as Assistant to the Section Chief, was safe, no matter who the next Section Chief might be. She knew he had enjoyed surprising her with his choice, but she also knew that he

couldn't have made a better one. Amanda looked at the daffodils starting to bloom, and at the rest of the flowerbeds, waiting for the weather to be just a bit warmer. She almost didn't hear the Corvette pull into the driveway.

"He got in?" Lee asked as he got out of the car and pointed to the front door.

"Yeah," she replied, walking over to greet her husband with a hug and a kiss. "He did it."

"Wow."

"Yeah, come on, let's go in so you can tell him that yourself." Arm in arm they entered the house.

End
file.